



THE DOCTOR'S PRESCRIPTION FOR

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Practical Insights into the World of Natural Healing

Healthy Fats

Many experts estimate that approximately 80 percent of the U.S. population consumes an insufficient quantity of essential fatty acids - found abundantly in flaxseed oil and other unrefined, polyunsaturated vegetable oils. This dietary insufficiency presents a serious health threat to Americans.

Essential Fatty Acids Are You Deficient In These Key Nutrients?

By Jade Beutler, R.C.P., R.R.T.

In this era of fat phobia and the resulting barrage of low-fat and non-fat food products lining the grocery store shelves, the recommendation to supplement your daily diet with one or two tablespoons of flaxseed oil may be puzzling. However, not all fats are alike. Flaxseed oil is high in special fats designated as essential fatty acids (EFAs). "Essential" simply means that we must consume these fatty acids through our diets because our bodies need them to survive, yet cannot manufacture them from other dietary fats or nutrients.

In addition to providing the body with energy, the EFAs - linoleic and linolenic acid - are components of nerve cells, cellular membranes, and hormone-like substances known as prostaglandins which play an important role in keeping the body in good working order.

Causes of EFA Deficiency

The adulteration of polyunsaturated oils caused by mass commercial refinement of foods has tremendously increased the amount of unnatural fats and oils added to our diet in the form of trans fatty acids and partially hydrogenated oils. Trans fats result when polyunsaturated oils are subjected to excessive heat, light, or oxygen, or other elements common to modern refining methods. These trans fats are semisolid or solid fat substances not duplicated anywhere in nature. Margarine is the ultimate representation of unnatural fats, containing both hydrogenated and trans fats.

Early in the twentieth century, Americans consumed about 125 grams of fat a day. Today,

the consumption is closer to 175 grams. That amounts to about 50 extra pounds a year - a 40 percent increase. Proportionally our consumption of saturated fats has remained relatively stable.

Our ingestion of unrefined polyunsaturated oils rich in the health-promoting EFAs has decreased dramatically. Conversely, our ingestion of refined, adulterated, polyunsaturated oil products has risen sharply, correlating with an increase in some of the health issues we see today.

These refined and processed compounds actually inhibit the body's ability to use the essential fatty acids that are consumed because they compete for the same absorption sites. And because synthetic fats have been prevalent in the diet for only about 100 years, our bodies have not yet had time to evolve to the point where they can handle these deadly compounds.

In sum, there are three primary factors contributing to our current EFA deficiency:

1. Unavailability of quality oils high in EFAs because of mass commercialization and refinement of fats and oils.
2. Transformation of healthful Omega-3 and Omega-6 oils into toxic compounds (hydrogenated and trans fats).
3. Metabolic competition between hydrogenated and trans fatty acids with the EFAs.

Recognizing Essential Fatty Acid Deficiency

The signs and symptoms of essential fatty acid deficiency may be overt, such as dry hair and skin,

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or they may be chronically nagging, such as mild fatigue that never seems to go away.

Most orthodox health care practitioners will never make the association between a health problem and EFA deficiency because they are not trained in nutrition, and the laboratory analysis to measure EFA deficiency is not widely available or appreciated. In addition, the symptoms of EFA deficiency are not as obvious as many other nutrient deficiencies. They can be so vague and broad that they are easily misdiagnosed as having some other cause. Even if an EFA deficiency is recognized, some clinicians may not understand how to treat it. Unfortunately, surveys suggest that most Americans are obtaining only about 10 percent of what they need for optimal health. This is why everyone, regardless of health status, should take flaxseed oil which is high in EFAs.

Some Practical Advice

Here are three recommendations to achieve better health and optimal levels of EFAs in body tissues.

1. Reduce the amount of saturated fats and total fat in the diet.

There is much research linking saturated fats to heart disease, stroke, and numerous cancers. Both the American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association have recommended a diet containing less than 30 percent of calories as fat (or about 400-600 calories per day, based on a standard 2000 calorie-a-day diet). It's obvious that the easiest way for most people to achieve this goal is to eat fewer animal products and more plant foods. With the exception of nuts and seeds,

most plant foods are very low in fat. And though nuts and seeds do contain high levels of fat calories, they are derived largely from polyunsaturated essential fatty acids.

2. Eliminate the intake of margarine and other foods containing trans fats and partially hydrogenated oils.

During the manufacture of margarine and shortening, vegetable oils are hydrogenated; that is, a hydrogen molecule is added to the natural unsaturated fatty acid molecules of the vegetable oil to make it more saturated. This change in structure of the natural fatty acid to "unnatural" fatty acid forms interferes with the body's ability to utilize essential fatty acids. Watch for these "stealth fats" by reading food labels carefully before you choose.

3. Take one or two tablespoons of flaxseed oil daily.

Organic, unrefined flaxseed oil is considered by many to be the answer to restoring the proper level of EFAs to the body. Flaxseed oil is unique because it contains both EFAs – alpha linolenic acid (Omega-3) and linoleic acid (Omega-6) – in appreciable amounts. Flaxseed oil is the highest source of Omega-3 fatty acids on earth. At a whopping 58 percent Omega-3 fatty acid by weight, it contains over twice the amount of fish oils. Omega-3 fatty acids have been extensively studied for their beneficial effects on cholesterol, blood pressure, heart and brain health, joint pain, immunity, skin disorders and cellular health.

Recommendations for Better Health

1. Reduce the amount of saturated fats and total fat in the diet.
2. Eliminate the intake of margarine and other foods containing trans fats and partially hydrogenated oils.
3. Take one or two tablespoons flaxseed oil daily.

Be Proactive:

In addition to their critical function in supporting normal physiology, essential fatty acids also represent a pro-active way to protect the heart, immune system, skin, and more. In fact, research suggests that a lack of EFAs can negatively affect the health of the blood vessels that lead to the heart and brain.

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